

EXPLORING NATURE FOR IDEAS
IN DESIGNING JEWELRY

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August 1974
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The problem. The specific problem undertaken in this creative project has been to observe natural objects in various forms as effected by change of season and environmental influences. These observations were recorded through the eye of the camera and used as inspiration in designing jewelry and containers for jewelry.

Procedure. The procedure has been to explore nature; photograph various discovered designs; sketch ideas for designs for jewelry from the photographs and select certain ones to execute in metal.

Findings. A more meaningful understanding of oneself can be reached by cultivating a deeper awareness of nature. A close examination of natural objects has developed a profound awareness of the apparent design potential evident in nature. As more time is spent in natural surroundings, a person's awareness grows so that communication with nature and with others becomes more effective. The result of relating nature to jewelry has aided in producing pieces with more than superficial meaning.

Conclusions. Hopefully, through this developed awareness the communication of feelings about nature can be more easily conveyed to others. Time will broaden ideas about nature and test the success or failure of the awareness concept.

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INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM

The craftsman can discover design potential through the exploration of nature that can serve as a major source of inspiration in the creation of jewelry. The problem undertaken in this project has been to observe natural objects such as trees, seed pods, fungus growth, bones and flowers, as they have been effected by change of season and environmental influences. The observations made were recorded through the eye of the camera. An analysis of the photographs taken provided ideas that were used in designing jewelry and containers for jewelry.

Nature was chosen as the source of inspiration because of a need to communicate with others through the ideas evolving from the design of jewelry. A more meaningful understanding of oneself can be reached by cultivating a deeper awareness of nature. The close examination of natural objects has developed a profound awareness of the apparent design potential evident in nature. As more time is spent in natural surroundings, a person's awareness grows so that communication with nature and with others becomes more effective.

The purpose of jewelry is to act as an embellishment of the wearer's appearance. Since antiquity, personal

adornment has been a significant part of man's culture. It can be in the magical sense attached to pieces of jewelry or in the personal satisfaction gained from wearing an unusual piece of jewelry. There will always exist the need for skilled craftsmen to produce jewelry. The craftsman today has explored many unusual materials in creating jewelry. "Craftsmen are rejecting the formal, trite designs of the past and experimenting with unconventional shapes, bold lines, bright colors and everyday material."¹

Through frequent encounters with nature, the artist becomes more observant. "The secret of life is hidden in the forms of nature, yet manifest and capable of being seen. Beyond the visible reality lies the true invisible reality which creates it. For, the most noble human sense of all is seeing."² The craftsman can examine a symmetrical butterfly or a non-symmetrical shell and use the lovely, graceful lines as a basis for a design although the end result may have no apparent resemblance to a specific object. It becomes the challenge of the designer to interpret, abstract, and adapt symmetrical or non-symmetrical forms in order to develop unique designs for jewelry.

¹Donald Wilcox, Body Jewelry: International Perspectives, (Henry Regnery Co., Chicago, 1973), book jacket (front).

²Gerhard Gollwitzer, Abstract Art, (New York, Sterling Publishing Co., Inc. 1970), p. 102.

PROCEDURES

At the beginning of the picture taking, an awareness of the rapidly declining number of elm trees still in existence due to the Dutch Elm disease became apparent. Elm trees are shown at various stages of their death in Figures 1-6. The disease eventually has destroyed the majority of elm trees. After taking many pictures of the dying elm trees a series of necklaces was designed with the dying trees as the theme. One design was selected to execute in sterling silver and has served as a memorial to the perishing elm trees. There was beauty even in the broken, fallen limbs. The tree necklace of silver is shown in Figure 7.

In examining the textural surface of the trees, both those alive and those losing their bark, the use of wood in different projects became more meaningful. A fragment of a twisted tree limb was found as shown in Figure 8. An attempt was made to analyze it for possibilities for jewelry designs. The ring in Figure 9, which is made using silver wire, carved rosewood and pearls, is an outcome of the analyzation of the design found in the piece of wood. The silver salad set in Figure 10 was designed using the wood grain to enhance the design of the handles. The graceful lines of the trees in Figures 1-6 are used in the design of the salad set and in the carved redwood pin in Figure 11.

After the series of projects designed in memory of the dying elm trees, the next step was to examine seed pods and fungus growth. The modular construction and radial designs of these objects inspired a series of rings. Seven different seed pods are shown in Figure 12. The largest seed pod pictured in Figure 12 influenced the design which is seen on the cast aluminum container in Figure 13. It is about two inches high. The seed pod in Figure 14 stimulated the idea that fostered the design for the sterling silver dinner ring shown in Figure 15. This ring was made by using the technique of hollow construction.

During an excursion in a wooded area the mushroom growth in Figure 16 was discovered in a decaying tree stump. Another mushroom growth, Figure 17, was found in an area where a dead elm had been removed. These mushroom clusters and the fungus growth in Figure 18 assisted in designing the nu-gold ring in the shape of a pyramid with a pearl and three jade beads varying in size clustered at its peak. This ring can be seen in Figures 19 and 20. The silver and pearl ring shown in Figures 21 and 22, is also influenced by the fungus and mushroom growth. Both rings have incorporated the technique of hollow construction.

After the seed pod series of jewelry and containers, an investigation of bones was started. The fossil of the fish skeleton in Figure 23, and bones in Figure 24, stimulated the design for the silver wire ring with lapis stone, Figures 25 and 26. Bones continued to offer an element of

fascination as is evidenced by the skeleton shown in Figure 27. The skeleton's symmetry and structure, the delicate curve of the weed in Figure 28, and the symmetrical cluster of pine cones in Figure 29, influenced the design of the silver butterfly pin in Figure 30. This piece has employed the techniques of repoussé and chasing for the body of the butterfly, forging and soldering for the wing shape with cloisonne wire soldered to the body for the wing design.

In relating other natural objects to designing jewelry, the spiral in the shells in Figures 31 and 32 and the radiating design in Figure 33, proved to be apparent in the series of crocheted and knitted collars and necklaces. The collar in Figure 34 was crocheted in thirty-two gauge fine silver wire using the technique of hairpin lace. The lace was mounted on a heavier wire that conforms to the neck and shoulder and fastens in front by interhooking with a formed silver disk. The drilled holes in the disk contain fine wire coils that hold the gray and white duck feathers. The crocheted collar in Figure 35 is twenty-eight gauge copper wire with pheasant feathers used in the fastener. An experiment which is not felt to be as successful is the knitted collar in Figure 36. It was done on circular knitting needles using thirty-two gauge copper wire. The uncurling of the fern in Figure 37, and the spirals in the shells in Figures 31 and 32 are all visible in the design of the necklace of forged and crocheted

silver wire in Figure 38. The crocheted piece in Figure 39 is influenced by these same natural objects. A bracelet, Figure 40 was done in silver, using a formed piece with crocheted wire. In the experimental bracelet in Figure 41, copper wire was interwoven with textured copper foil.

The wild flowers blooming in Figure 42, are characteristic of the surface treatment achieved in the cast aluminum container shown in Figures 43 and 44. The surface texture was the result of sculpting the model for the container in styrofoam which was burnt out when the molten aluminum was poured into the sprued form that had been packed in sand.

With the arrival of another season and warmer weather, subjects for possible designs were again sought in nature. An unusual discovery was made one morning in finding several large rain-filled tracks that had been made by a heavy vehicle. The water in the tracks had frozen over during the night. The resulting patterns were elegant in their design as shown in Figures 45 and 46. These ice formations inspired the necklace in Figure 47 as did the mayapple leaf in Figure 48. The necklace, Figure 49, incorporates plastic rings, crocheted lamé thread and wire.

SUMMARY

In summation, the problem in this project has been to observe natural objects and relate the awareness developed

through this study to the designing of jewelry. The results of this study can only be evaluated from a personal point of view in that the designer enjoys wearing the creations produced. The method used to collect data for the study was photography. Various aspects of nature were explored and photographed. These photographs were evaluated for their possible use in designing jewelry. By this exploration of nature for ideas in designing jewelry, a deeper awareness of the environment has been acquired. The result of relating nature to jewelry has aided in producing pieces with more than superficial meaning. Sculptural forms seen in natural objects as shown in the photographs appear in the various series of jewelry that have developed from the awareness attained through this extensive study of nature. Hopefully, through this developed awareness the communication of feelings about nature can more easily be conveyed to others. No attempt has been made to draw a conclusion about the success of the development of this awareness of nature. It is hoped that the personal awareness will be a meaningful influence upon future work. Time will broaden ideas about nature and test the success or failure of the awareness concept.



Figure 1
Partially Dead Elm Tree



Figure 2
Fallen Limbs of Elm Trees



Figure 3
Dying Elm Tree



Figure 4

Elm Tree Losing Bark



Figure 5

Close Up of Dying Elm



Figure 6

Bark Peeling From Dead Elm

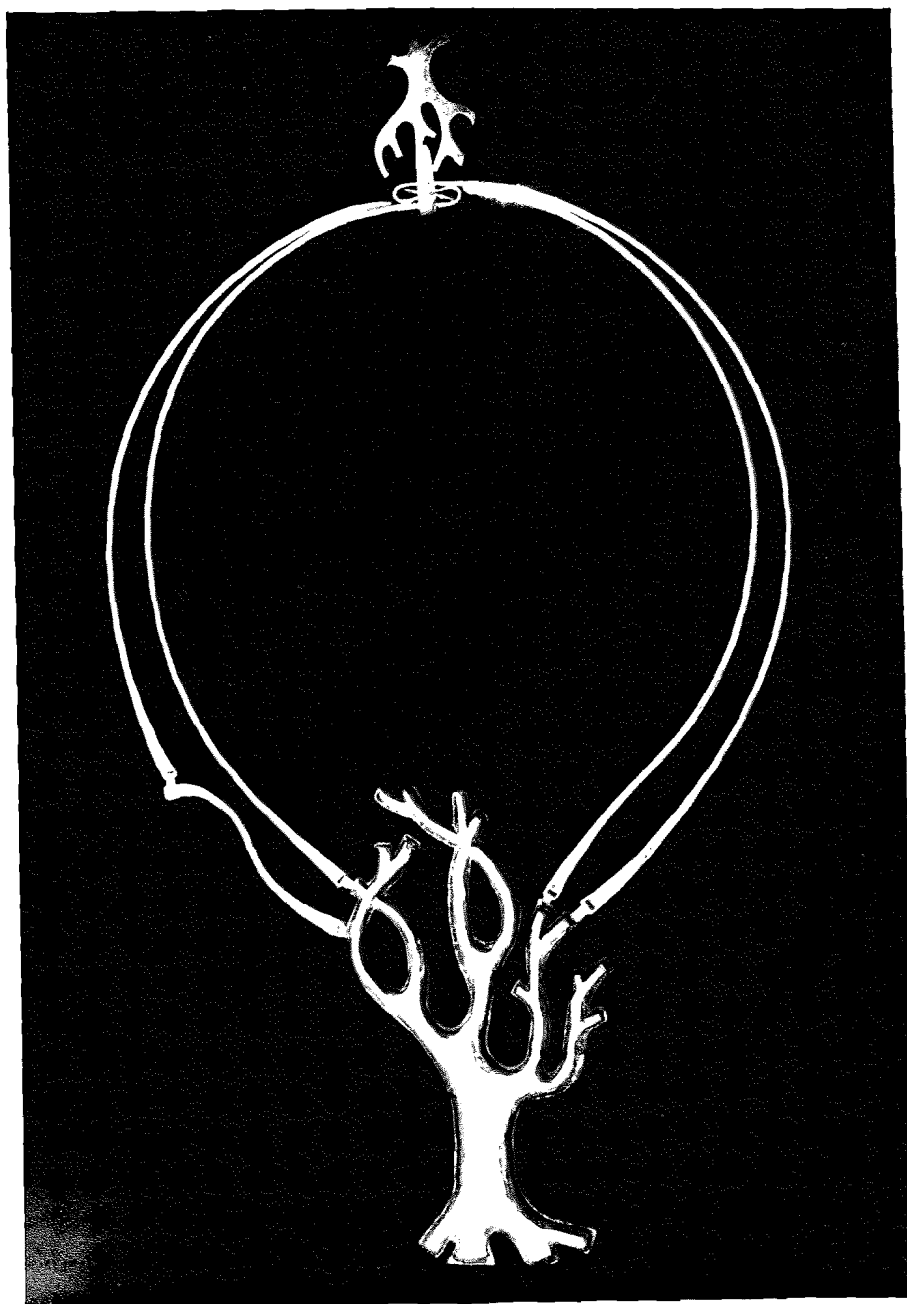


Figure 7

Silver Tree Necklace



Figure 8
Fragment of Tree Limb

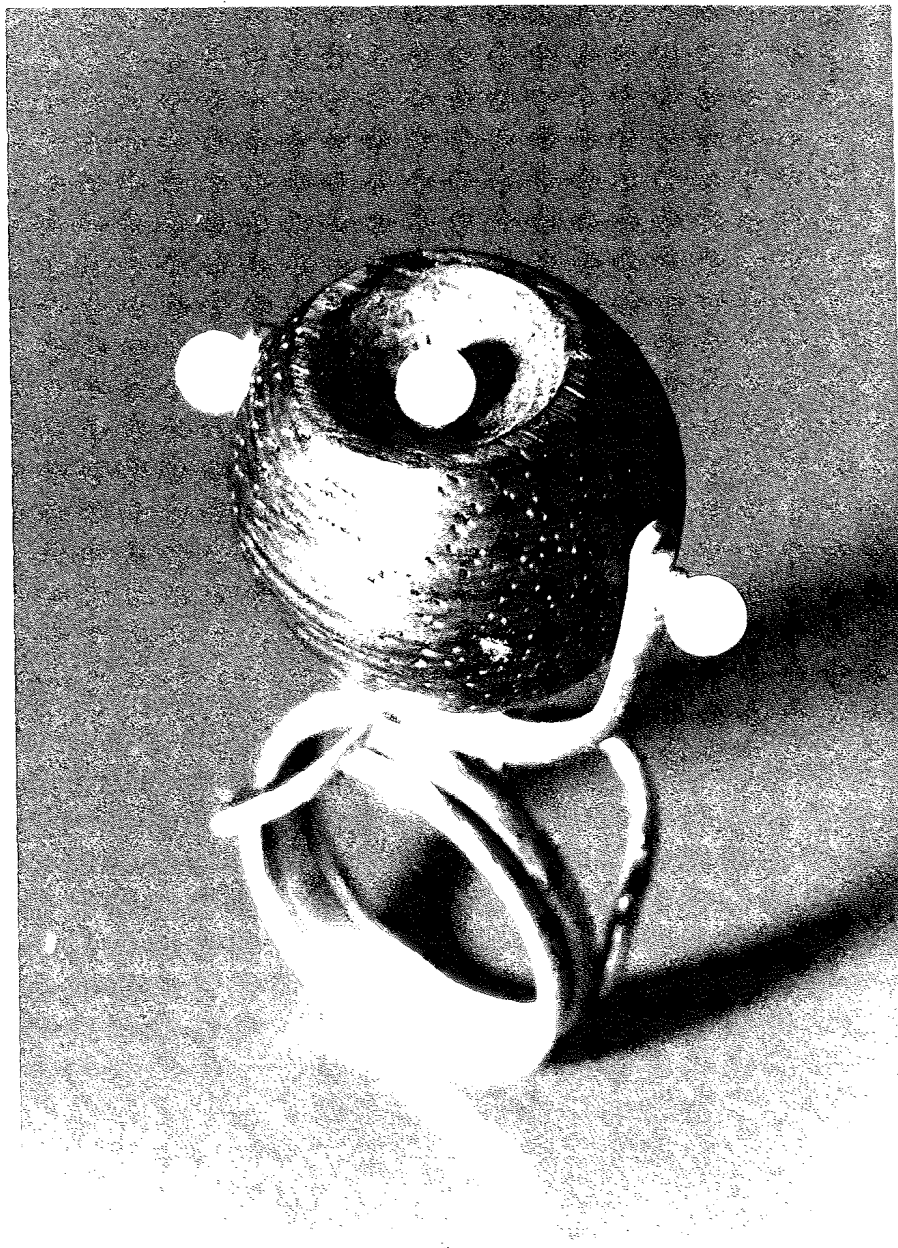


Figure 9

Rosewood Ring



Figure 10
Silver Salad Set

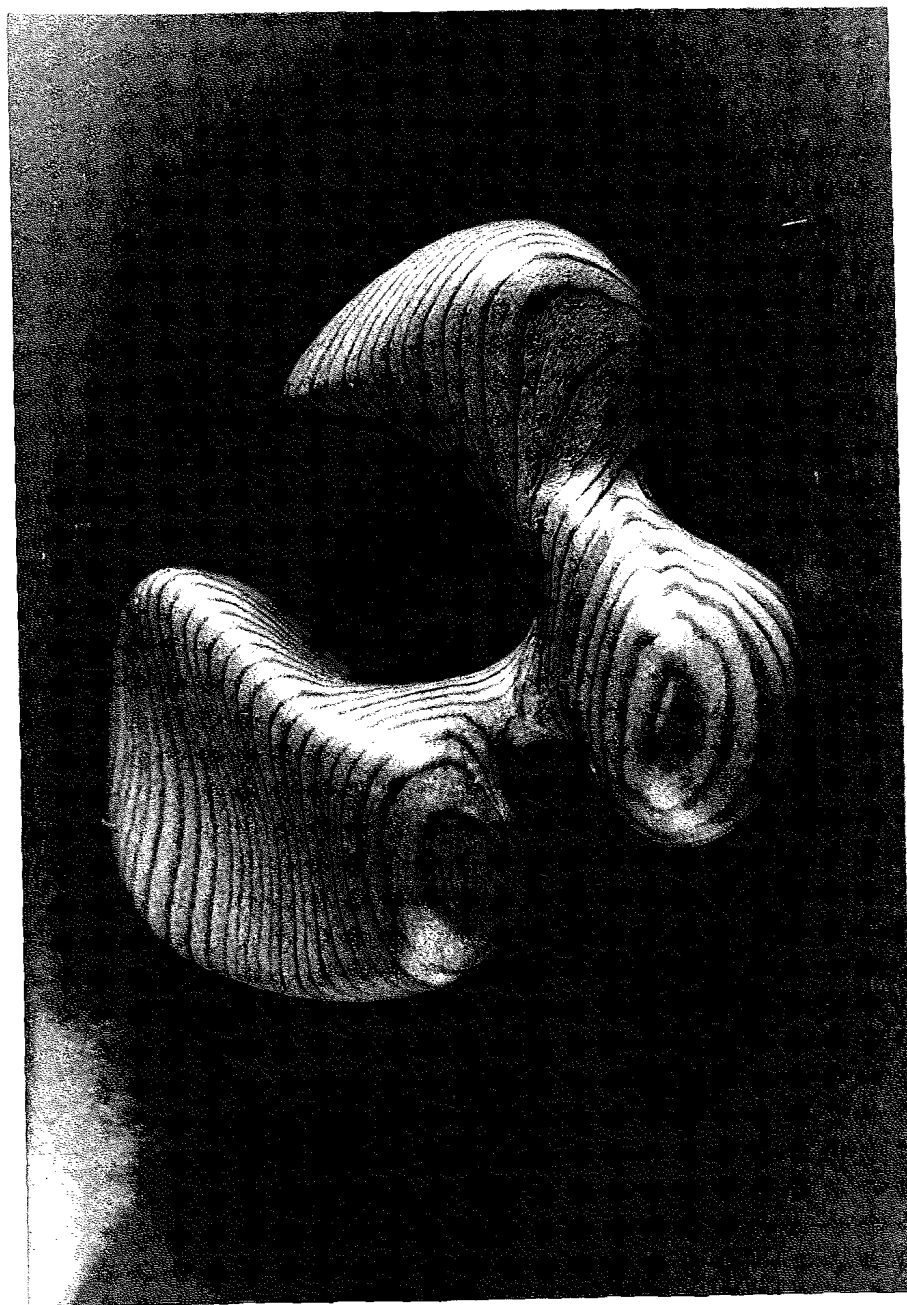


Figure 11

Redwood Pin

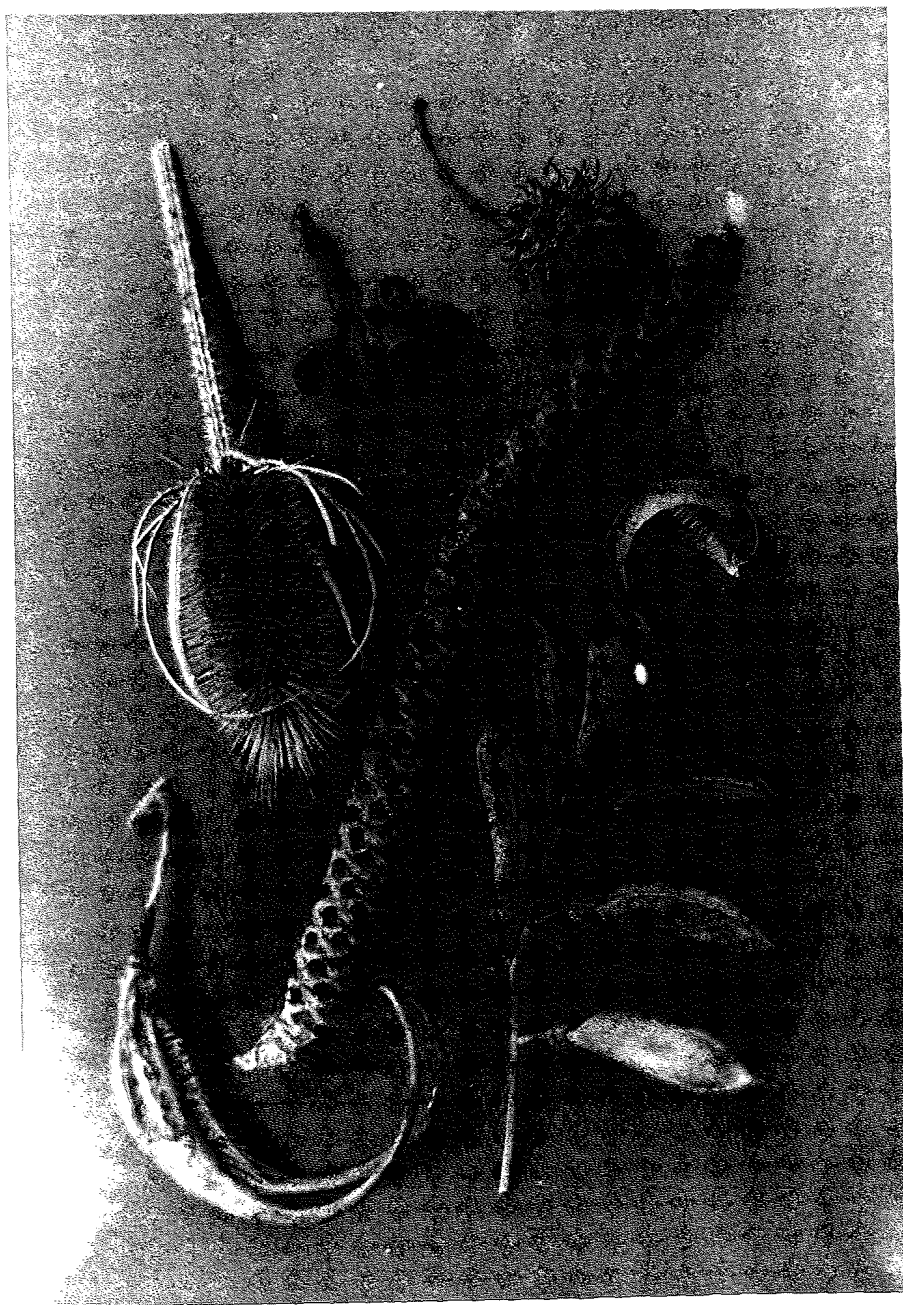


Figure 12
Seed Pods

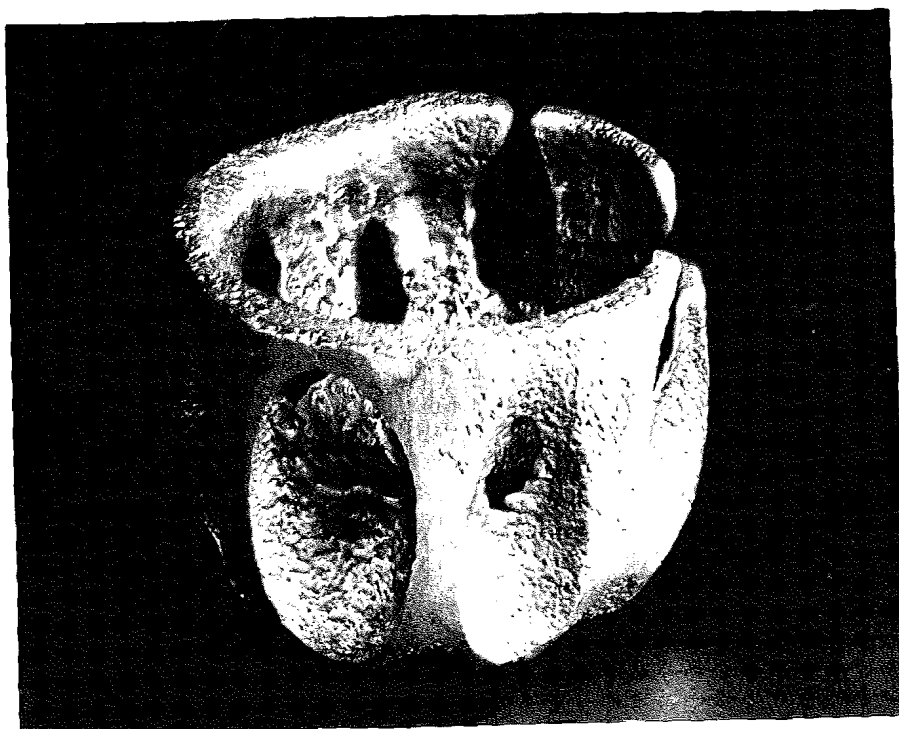


Figure 13
Cast Aluminum Container



Figure 14

Seed Pod

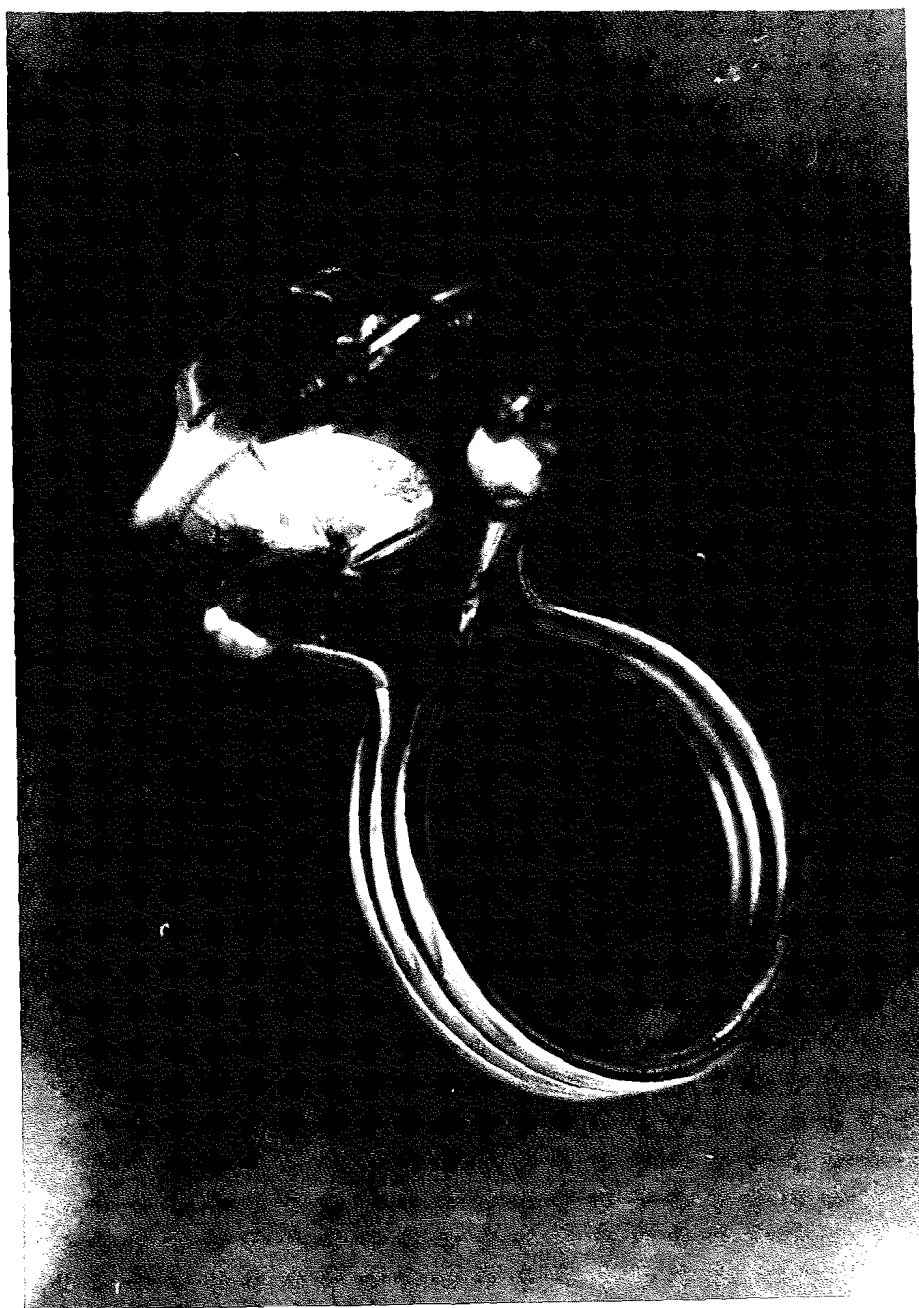


Figure 15
Silver Ring



Figure 16
Mushroom Growth

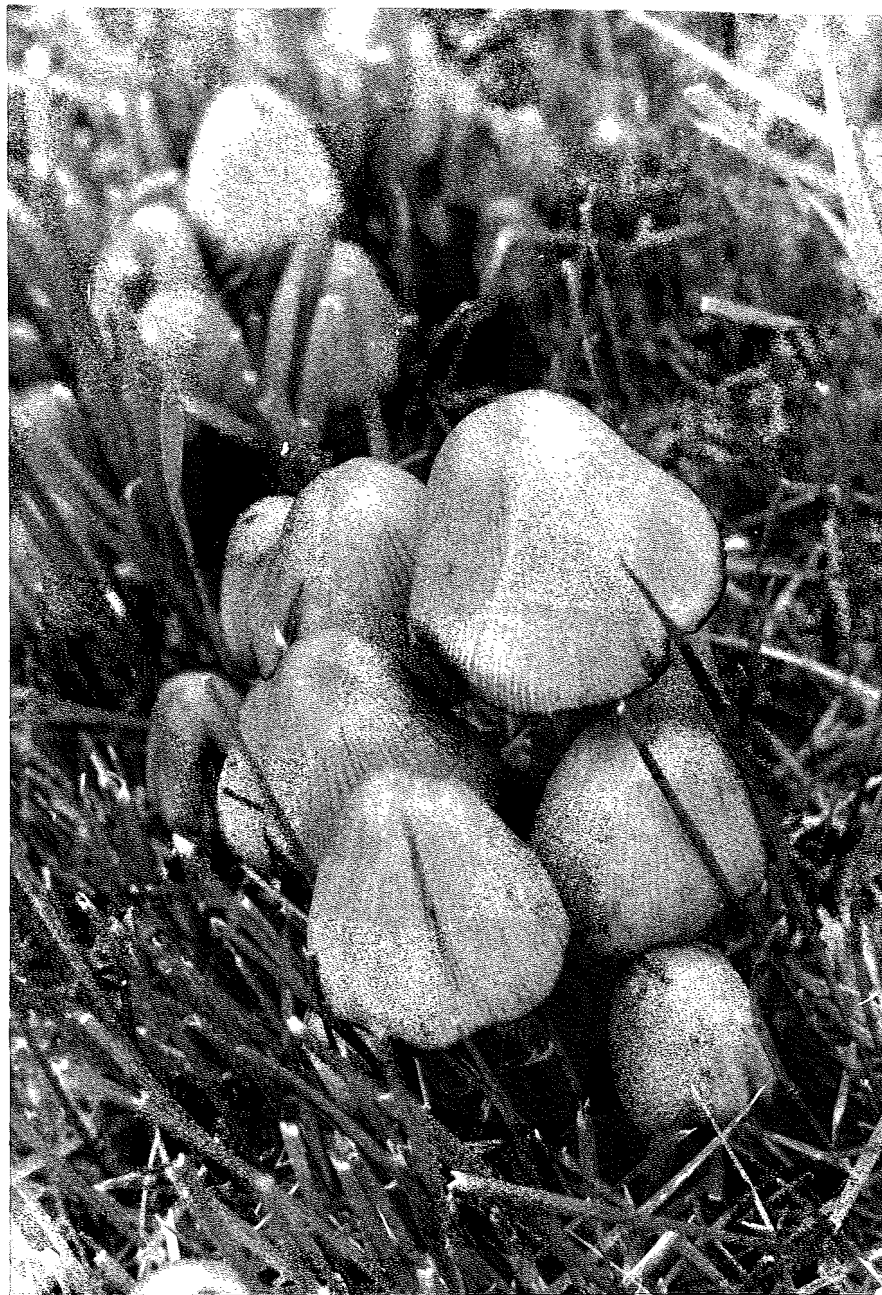


Figure 17

Mushroom Growth



Figure 18
Fungus Growth

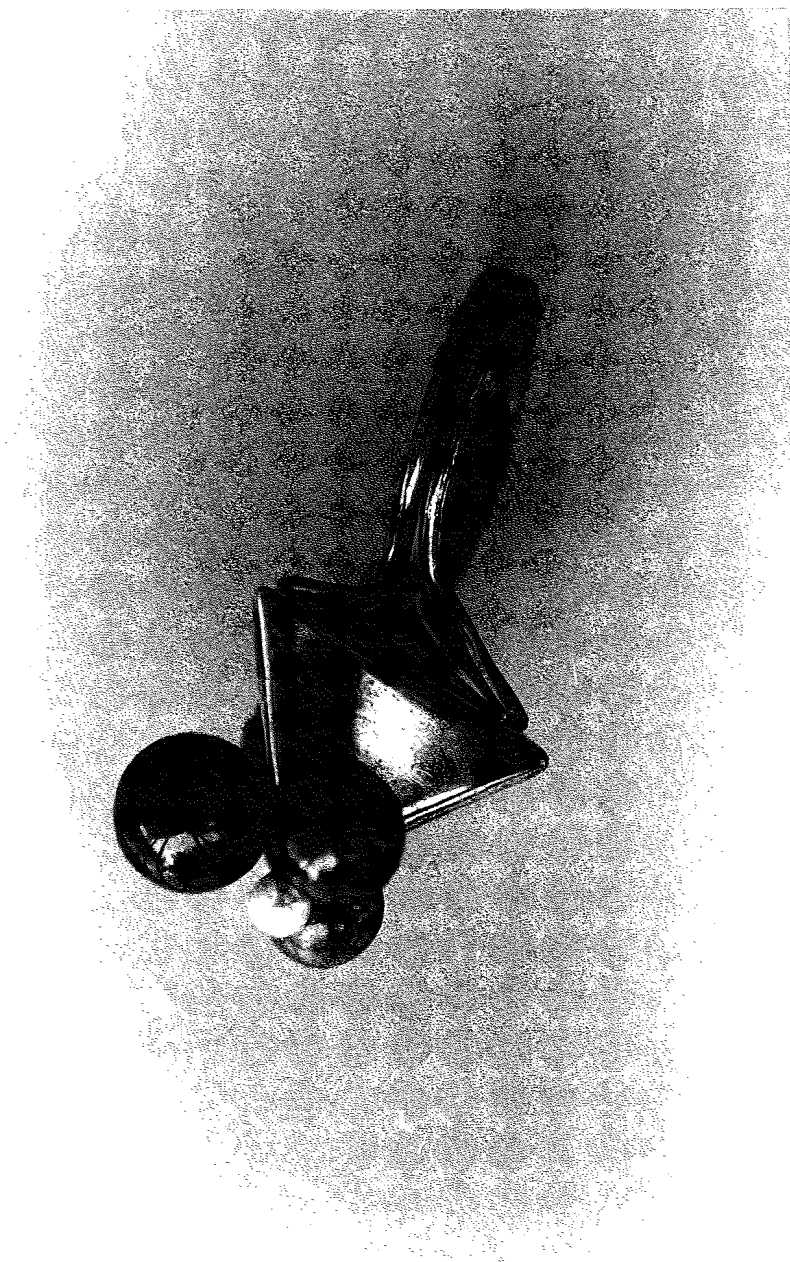


Figure 19
Nu-gold and Jade Ring

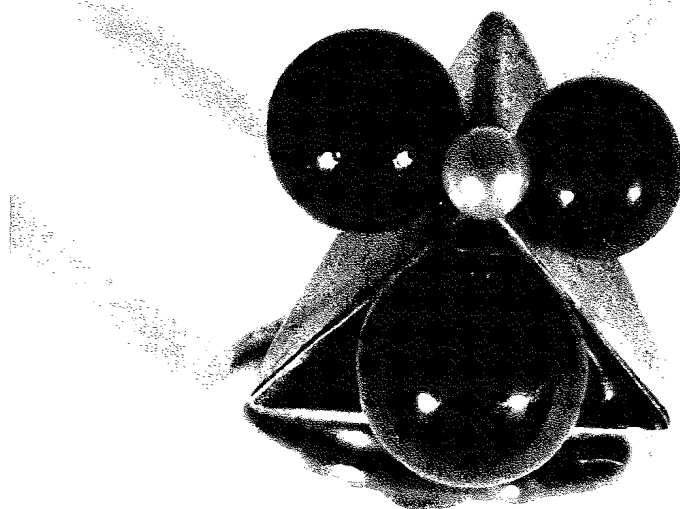


Figure 20
Nu-gold and Jade Ring (Top View)



Figure 21
Silver and Pearl Ring



Figure 22
Silver and Pearl Ring (Top View)

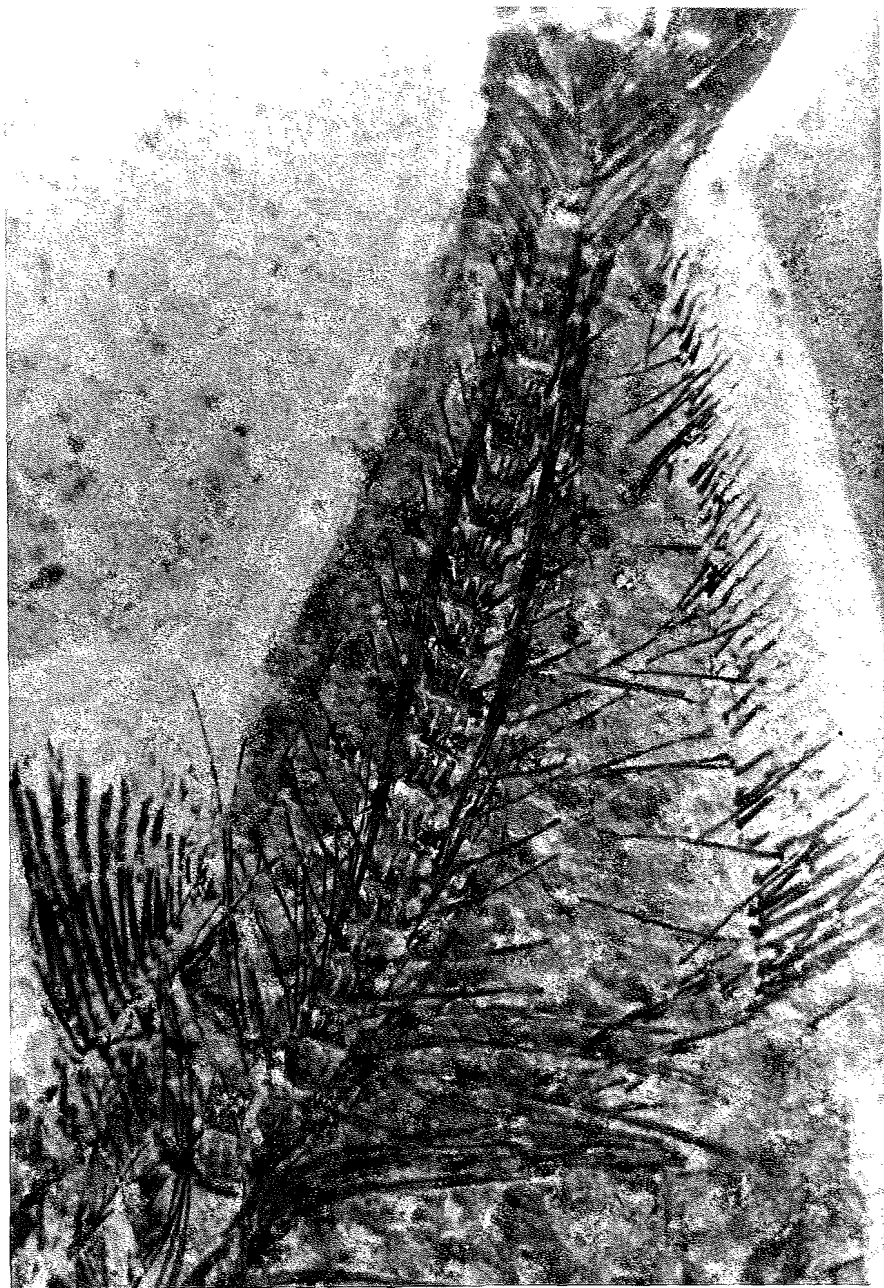


Figure 23
Fish Fossil

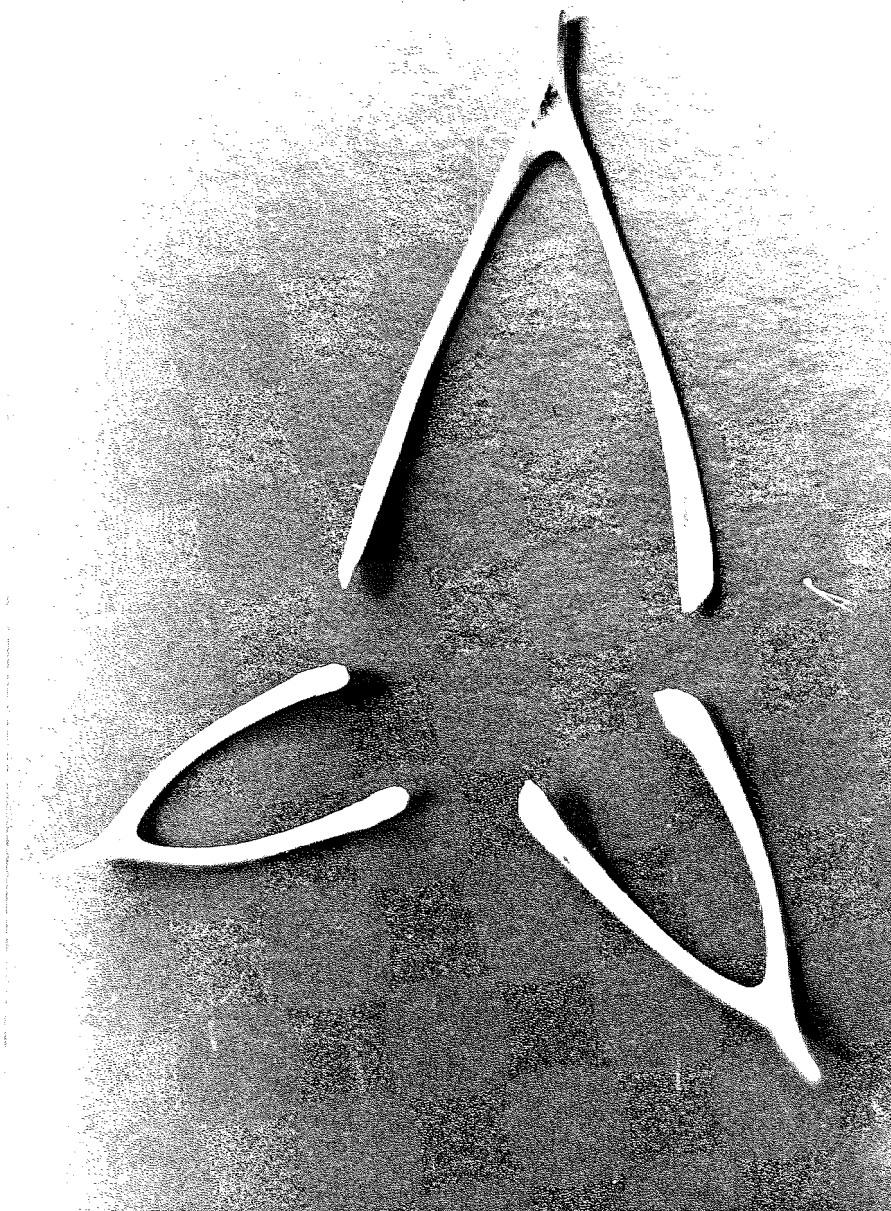


Figure 24

Bones



Figure 25
Silver Ring With Lapis

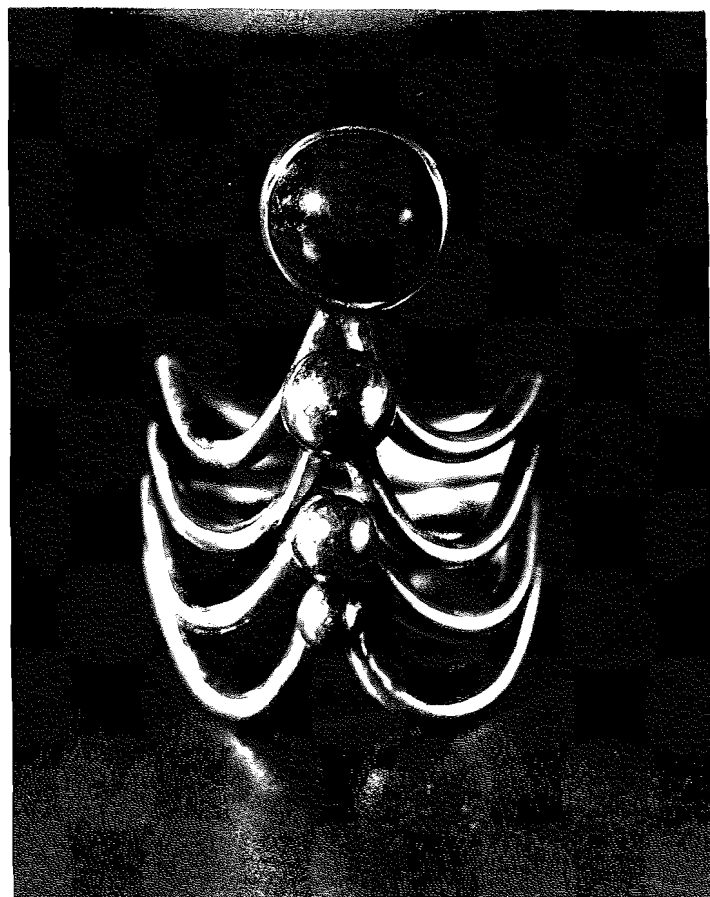


Figure 26
Silver Ring With Lapis



Figure 27
Skeleton of a Cowhead



Figure 28

Weeds

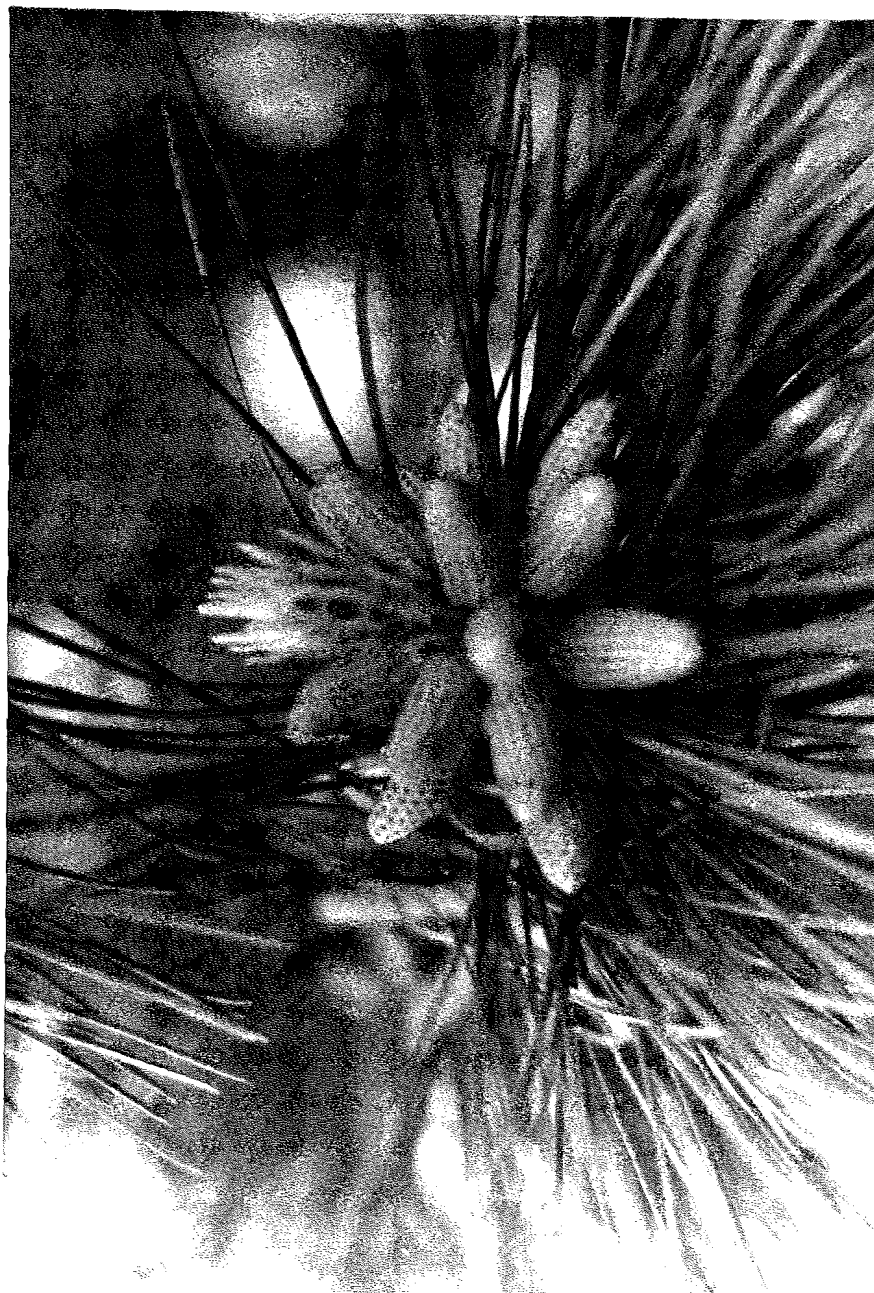


Figure 29
Pine Cones

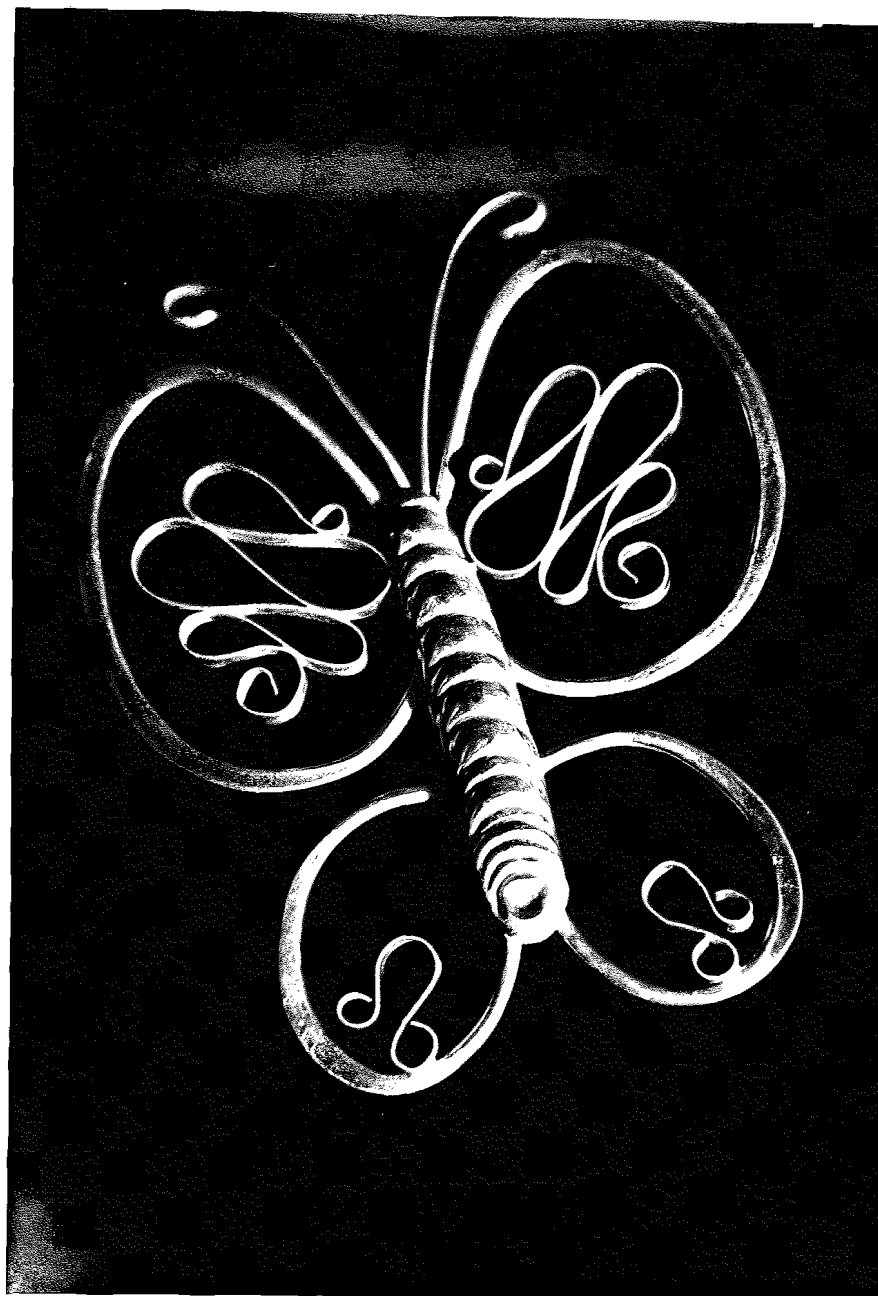


Figure 30
Silver Butterfly Pin



Figure 31
Snail Shell



Figure 32

Sea Shell



Figure 33
Dried Leaf Formation

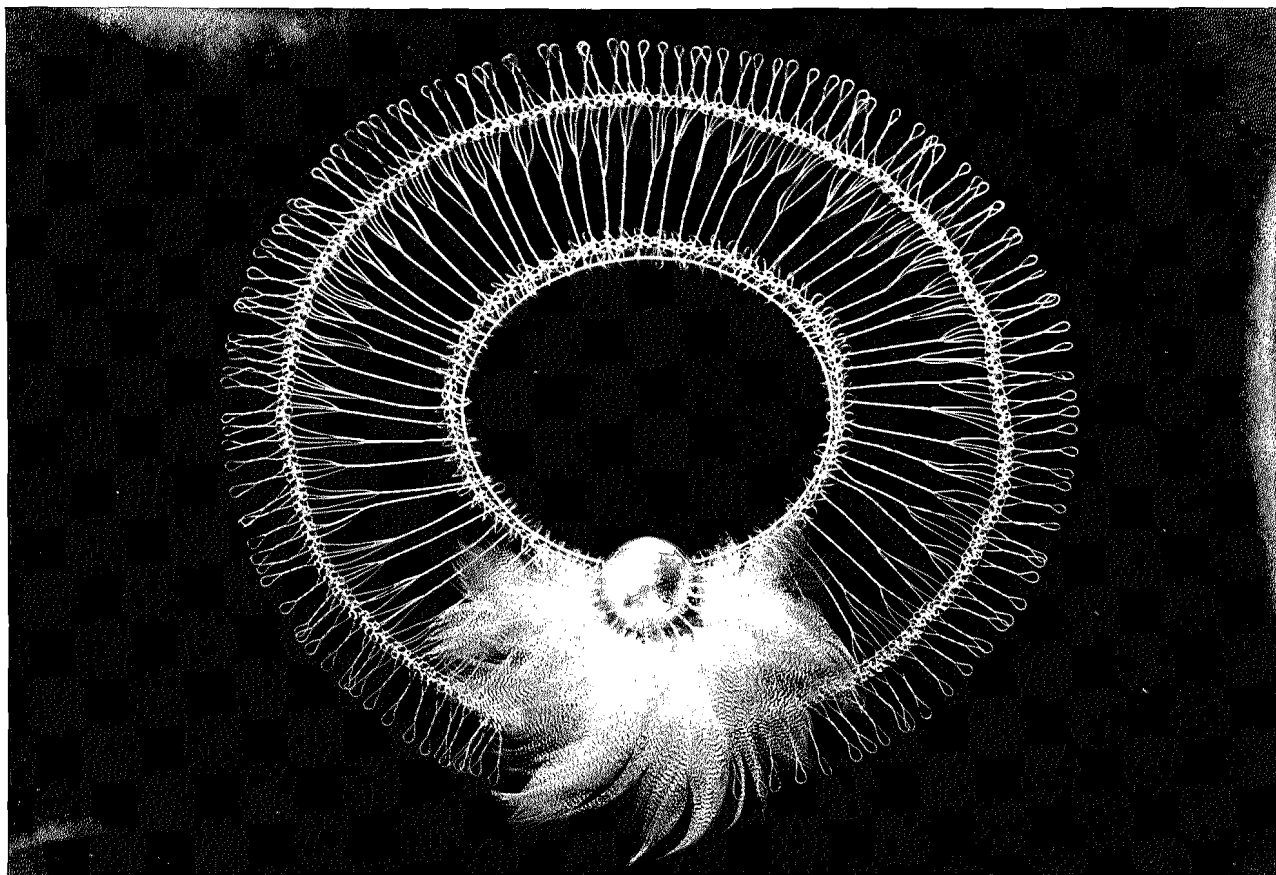


Figure 34
Crocheted Silver Collar With Feathers

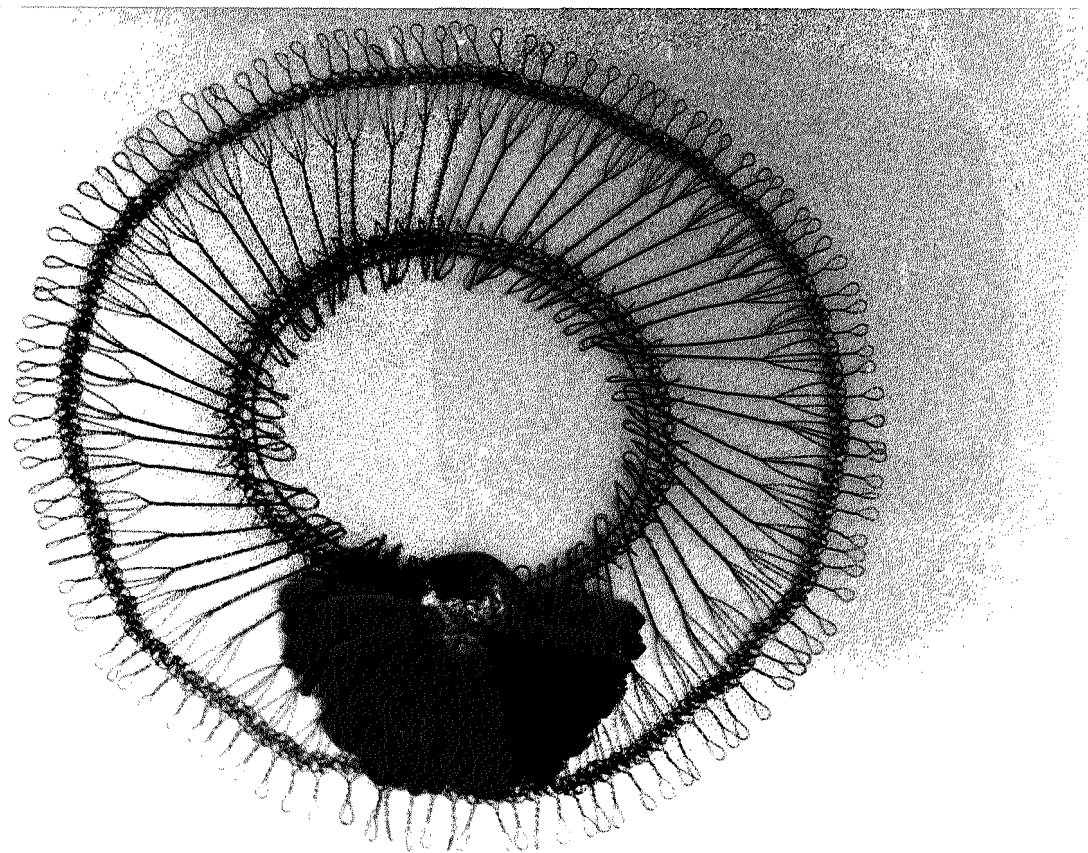


Figure 35

Crocheted Copper Collar With Feathers

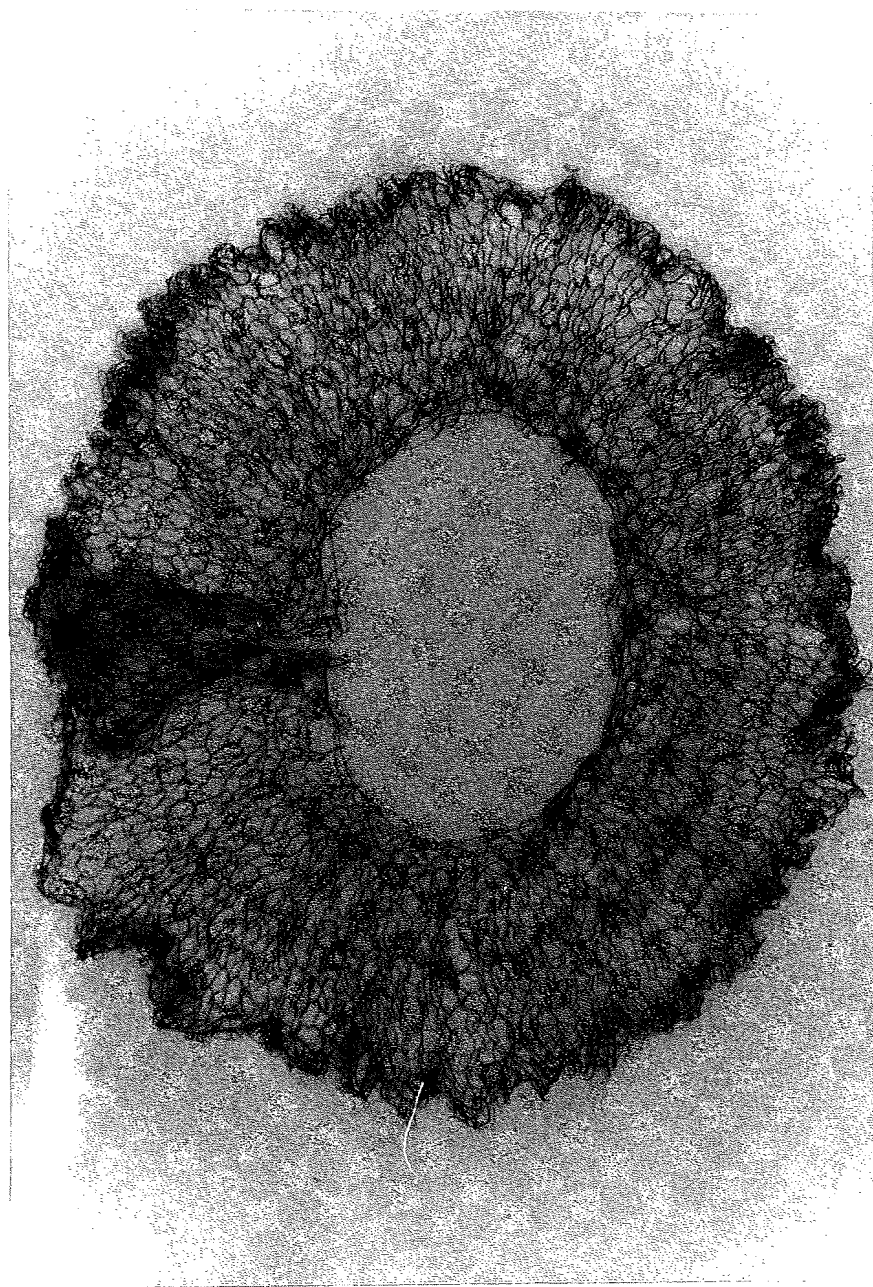


Figure 36
Knitted Copper Collar



Figure 37
Woodland Fern

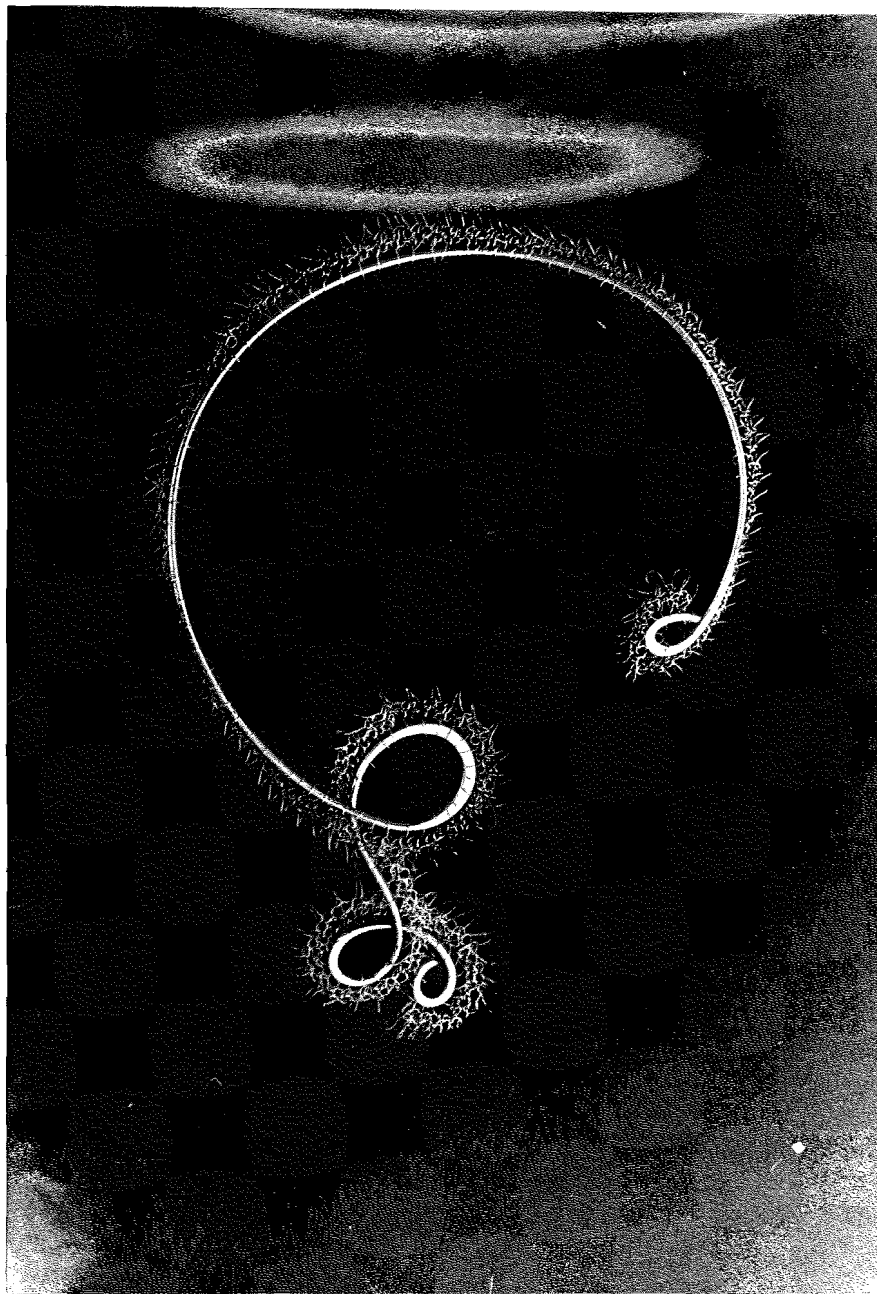


Figure 38
Crocheted and Forged Necklace

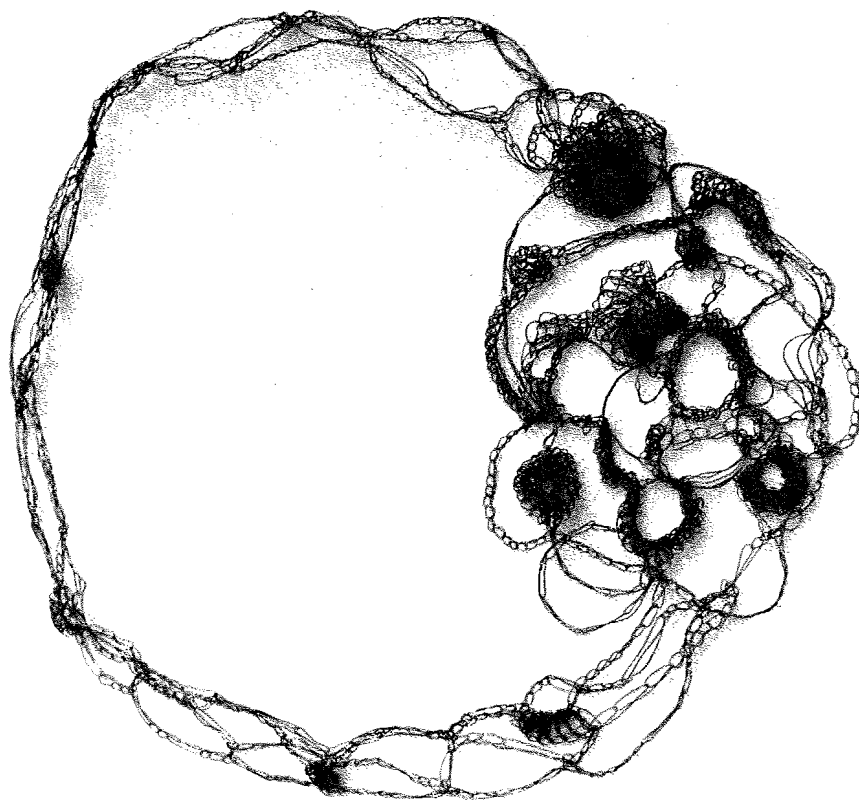


Figure 39
Crocheted Necklace



Figure 40
Crocheted Silver Bracelet



Figure 41

Woven Copper Bracelet

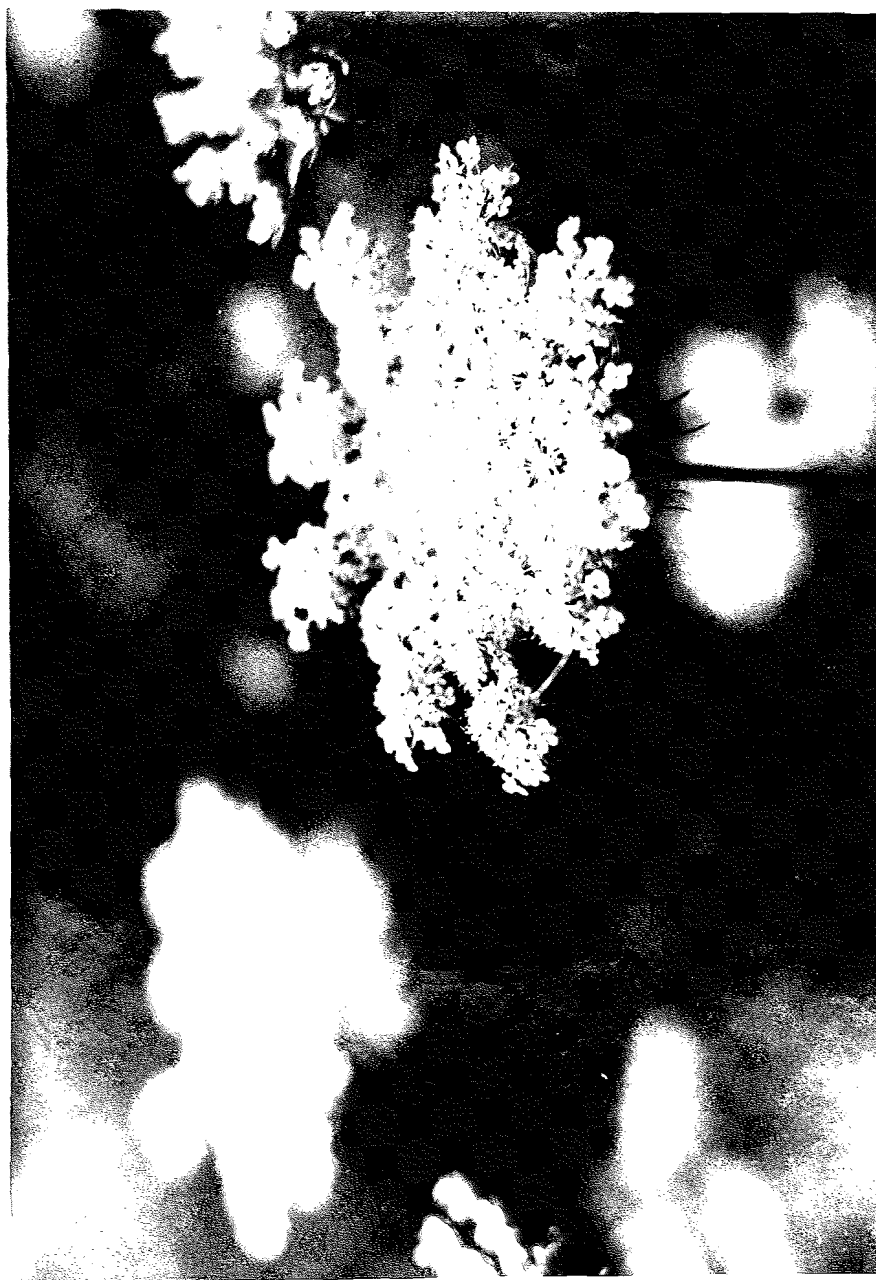


Figure 42
Wild Flowers in Bloom

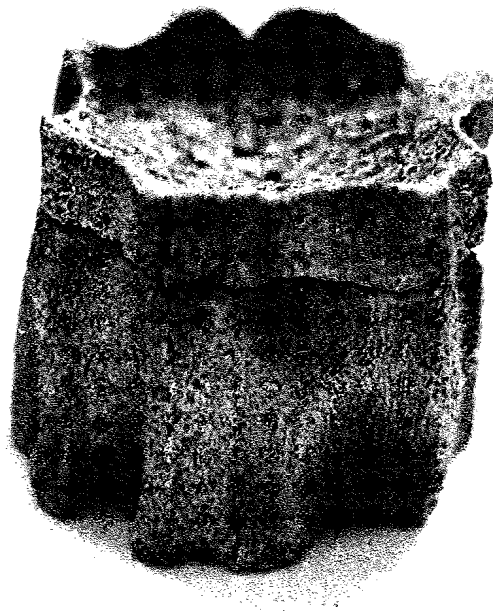


Figure 43

Cast Aluminum Container

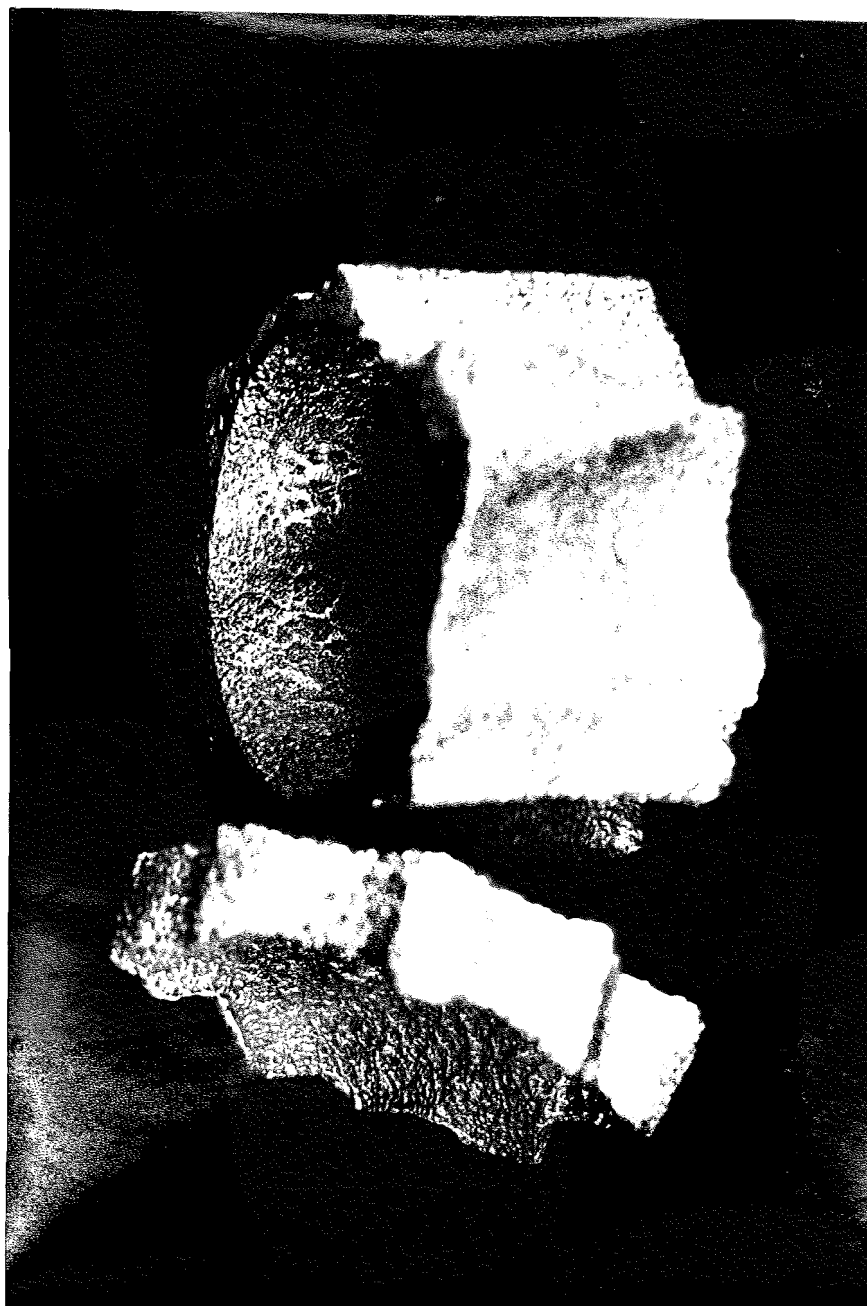


Figure 44
Cast Aluminum Container



Figure 45
Ice Formation

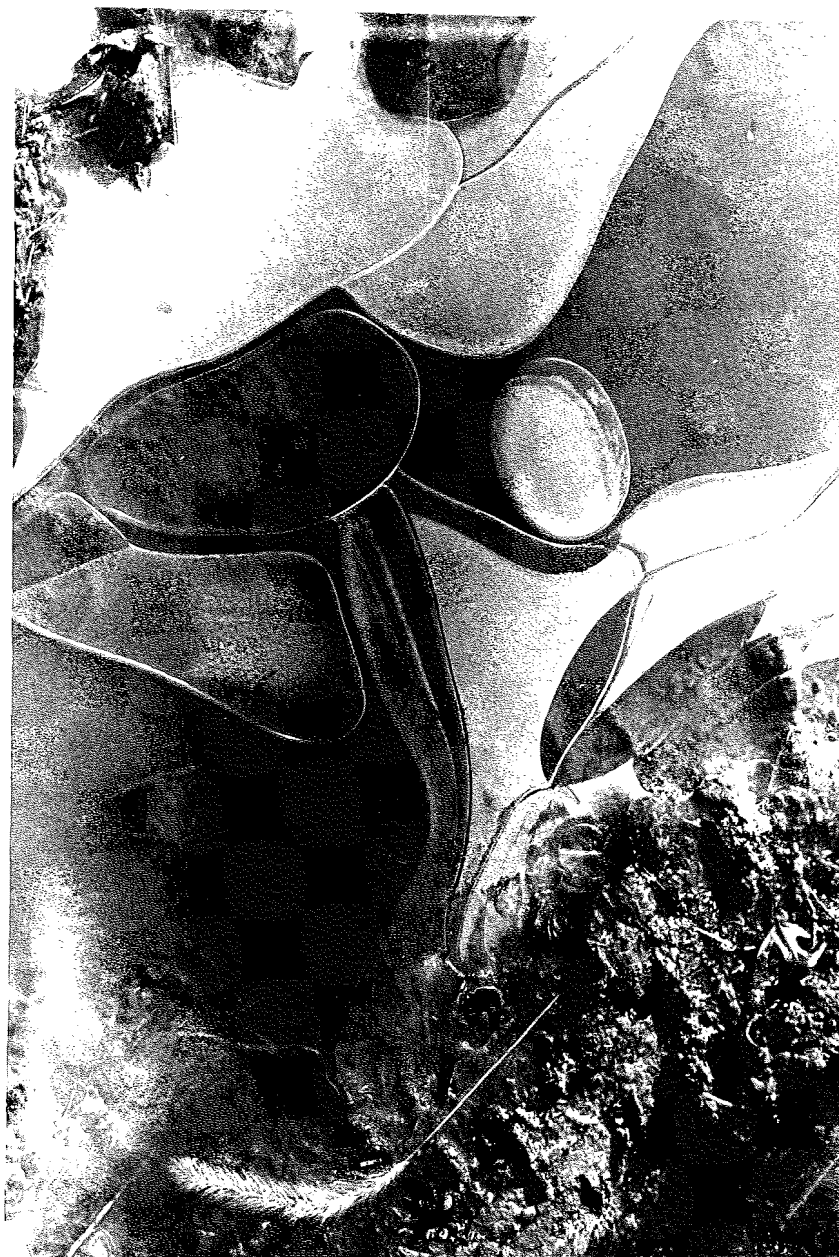


Figure 46
Ice Formation



Figure 47
Mayapple Leaf

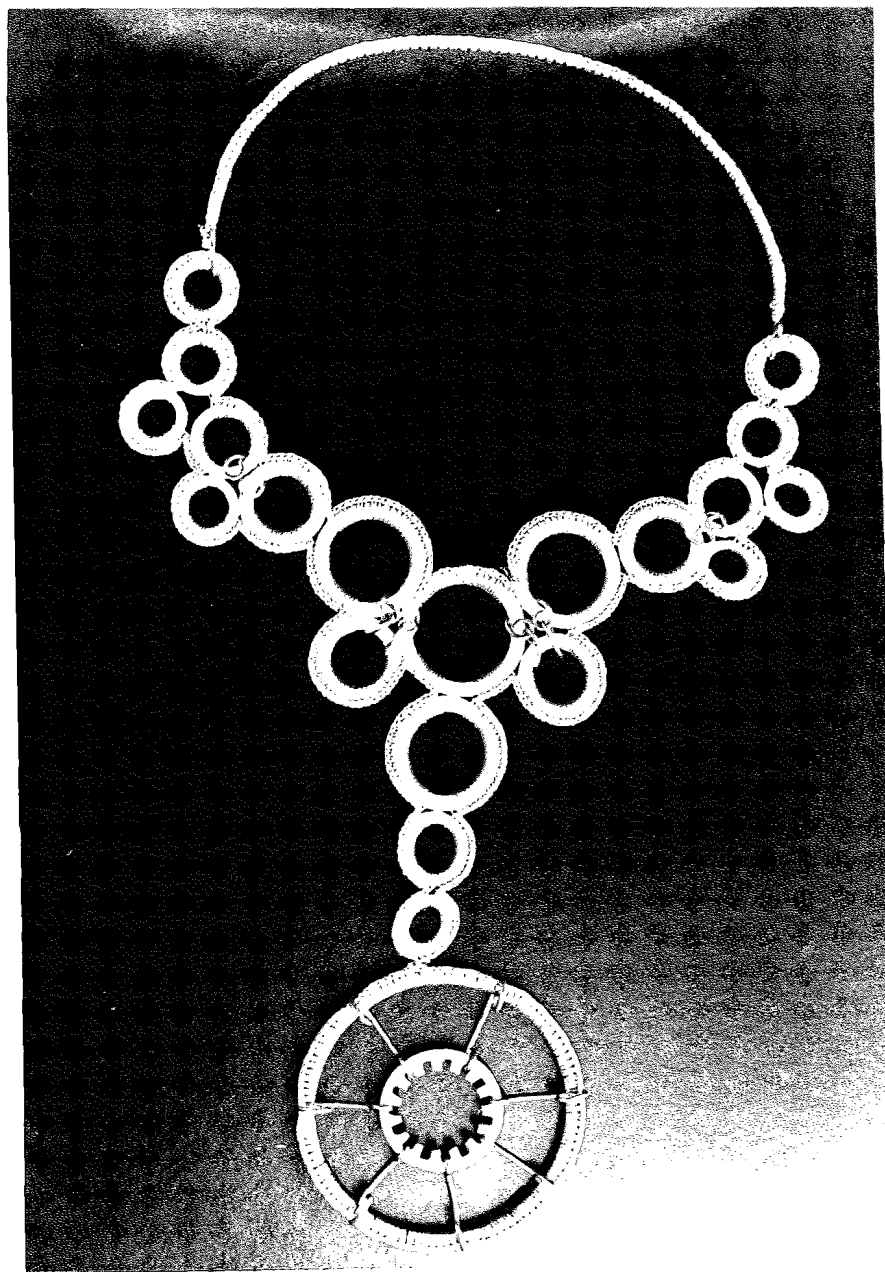


Figure 48
Crocheted Necklace

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